



Are You Green Certified?

With all types of programs now offered, and their various designation seals popping up on hotels and restaurants all over the country, green certification is becoming more prevalent in today's industry. At the "How to Achieve a Sustainable Restaurant" panel at the 2008 Commercial Construction Show, moderator Mike Hess of X-nth Earth in Maitland, Fla., said, "To borrow a popular phrase, if not now, when? A green building is a tangible way to show your values. And interim goals are important steps on your way to bigger overall goals."

Whether it's nationwide or state-sponsored or for the initial building process or for overall efficiency, everyone agrees that the benefits

of certification programs can be substantial. Energy savings, lower water consumption, improved public perception and a healthier work environment all contribute to a nice return on investment.

Here's an overview of some of the biggest green certification programs out there:

Florida Green Lodging Program www.floridagreenlodging.org

Sponsored by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), this program was established in 2004 to reward lodging facilities that conserve Florida's resources.

Other states with similar types of certifica-

tion programs include Michigan, California and Virginia, with several others interested in starting a program like Florida's. "We've been contacted by Colorado and Tennessee. And we're scheduled to talk at the upcoming Georgia Governor's Conference on Tourism," says Program Manager Peter Goren.

Benefits to designated properties include a listing on the program's website, inclusion on the site's green lodging locator and use of its logo on all marketing material.

Another benefit came from Governor Charlie Crist in 2007, when he signed an executive order requiring that whenever possible his state agencies hold their meetings and conferences



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only at hotels with the Florida Green Lodging designation.

Certification Process: After submitting an application, a facility completes a self-assessment. “Basically you walk around the hotel with a checklist, see what you currently have and make note of the requirements you need to work on,” says Goren. Then an on-site assessment request is submitted. After that evaluation is completed and approved, a ceremony is scheduled and the property becomes an official



From the experts ...

Our interview subjects were asked to pass along some tips for properties thinking about going green or starting one of the certification processes. Here are their responses:

From the Florida Green Lodging Program’s Peter Goren: **“If anyone has any concerns about getting started, contact us. One of the things we are so proud about with our program is that many of our member hotels are more than happy to talk to the competition about the program and some of their concerns.”**

From Lee Weeks with the Sandpearl Resort: **“Once you know that you want to get LEED certified, contact the LEED group immediately, use their consultants and have conversations throughout the building process.”**

From Proximity Hotel’s Beth Sinnott: **“Definitely use your resources. One thing I would say is assemble your entire team and try to keep that core team from the beginning. Your design team and your build team need to be integrated with open communication and patience.”**

From Ashley Katz with the USGBC: **“Talk to someone who’s already gone through this. Then find a LEED Accredited Professional (AP). Having one on your team can add points. Also, LEED offers lots of different tracking systems. So register your project early on for access to everything.”**

designated member of the program.

And if a property doesn’t meet the requirements on its first try? Goren assures that second chances are given. “Remember, it’s a voluntary, non-regulatory program. We’re not out to bust anybody. We just want to save state resources.”

LEED Certification www.usgbc.org

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) sponsors one of the most stringent programs for the design and construction of green buildings—the nationally recognized LEED or “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design” ratings system. The number of points accumulated by a project in each of LEED’s six major categories determines its certification level of Certified, Silver, Gold or Platinum.

Started in 2000, only 17 hotels and restaurants have been completely certified; and hundreds more are awaiting word of final designation, are in the middle of the extensive evaluation process or are preparing for the process by getting LEED educated.

The Proximity Hotel, located in Greensboro, N.C., is currently in LEED’s review process, but believes it will be the first certified Platinum hotel in the country. Account Executive Beth Sinnott says they found the process easier than expected. “Our president said, ‘Get ready. We’re going to climb a mountain.’ But halfway through, we realized it was only a hill. We planned on reaching Gold and then realized Platinum was within our grasp, so we went for it.”

Certification Process: A project team submits an application through the USGBC’s website, and each category prerequisite is then reviewed for compliance. After a Preliminary Review document is issued, the project team

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3. Offer a “Green Employee Award.”

When an employee goes the extra mile in serving the planet (and, by extension, serving his or her fellow staff members and guests), this hard work should not go unnoticed! Offer a “Green Employee Award” for employees who go above and beyond in service of Mother Earth, and give them affirmation and a great gift for their initiatives.



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provides corrections or additional supporting documents. Then the USGBC conducts a final LEED Review and determines certification status. Once the team accepts the results, the project can be referred to as LEED Certified as it awaits its certificate and LEED plaque.

Pizza Fusion, a restaurant chain started in Deerfield, Fla., hopes to have 20 stores open by the end of the year—with all built to LEED certification standards. Two are already tracking at Silver level. “I think people would be very surprised at what a couple of minor changes will do to the economics of a restaurant,” says cofounder Mike Gordon. “Little changes really do make big differences.”

Green Restaurant Association
www.dinegreen.com

The green movement has exploded since the Green Restaurant Association (GRA)

first began 18 years ago. Founder Michael Oshman says, “In 1990, we were sort of the lone wolf out there. Now we have a track record of almost two decades of certifying restaurants and helping them reach a higher level of sustainability.”

The GRA currently has between 250 and 300 members in 30 states and Canada. Certification benefits include a listing on GRA’s Dine Green website, use of the Green Restaurant seal for marketing purposes and access to a list of GRA-endorsed green products. Also, Oshman says the GRA helps restaurants by notifying them of legislation changes such as Styrofoam bans and recycling mandates.

Certification Process: After the GRA meets with a restaurant and a contract is signed, the restaurant commits to making four environmental steps a year from the program’s checklist of 11 Environmental Guidelines. Once a restaurant makes the suggested changes, the GRA verifies via invoices and then certifies the property.

Other green certification programs include the Green Seal “Greening the Lodging Industry” program, the EPA Energy Star Challenge and the relatively new EcoGreen Award, a national lighting certification program for restaurants and retail.

On track to receive LEED Silver certification, the Clearwater Beach Sandpearl Resort is also a Florida Green Lodging designated property. Lee Weeks, CEO of Coral Hospitality, the resort’s development partner, says that no matter what the certification process, it’s just a smart thing to do. “There are a large number of people that want to participate in environmentally friendly businesses. And if it’s going to return on the investment and make you feel good, why not?” He adds, “You don’t have to give up offering a luxurious experience when going green. You really can have it all.”

Greening Your Meetings ...

Ditch the Unnecessary Waste.

Big corporate meetings often involve trays of bottled water and Styrofoam cups for coffee—both of which create unnecessary amounts of waste. Instead, ask for pitchers of water to be set out on the table, and use real glasses and coffee cups for drinking.

Use Edible Centerpieces.

Centerpieces that consist of beautiful and delicious fruits and veggies are a smart way to cut back on the cost and waste associated with expensive flower arrangements. Many florists fly in their products from all over the world, wasting fuel and adding to their carbon footprint. Forgo the out-of-state flowers and arrange a visually appealing centerpiece with local fruits and veggies ... perfect for snacking on during those long meetings, too!

Have a Paperless Meeting.

In today’s era of technology, paper has become a thing of the past. Use PowerPoint and other technological advancements in order to have an entirely paperless meeting. You can email a list of the important points or the entire PowerPoint presentation to associates before the meeting so that everyone can follow along easily.

Going green no longer has to be relegated to the rich and famous in Hollywood. It can also be a smart, ethical and cost-effective way to run a business, no matter how big or small your budget. For other great ideas on how to run a green company, you can visit Swissôtel Chicago’s website at www.swissotelchicago-meetings.com.

4. Institute a Green Linen Program.

Laundering can be one of the most unnecessarily wasteful portions of the hospitality business. Instead of washing the towels and blankets on every day of a guest’s stay, as part of the Green Linen Program, hang up a sign that states that towels and linens will only be washed if placed on the floor. Otherwise, it will be assumed that the guest is satisfied with the current state of the linens. This will save thousands of gallons of water and cut back on the amount of detergent used. Small steps such as these truly do make a big difference for the environment.